

REMARKS

In this Preliminary Amendment, Claims 6, 12 and 19 have been amended and new Claims 24-28 have been added. The application now includes Claims 6-9, 11-13, 15-28 (Claims 16-18 withdrawn from consideration), with Claims 6, 12 and 19 being the only independent claims. Favorable reconsideration, in view of the above amendments and accompanying remarks, is respectfully requested.

On page 4 of the Official Action dated September 27, 2006, the Examiner has objected to Claims 6 and 12 for the reasons noted therein. It is believed that the above changes to the claims overcome these objections.

On page 4 of the Official Action dated September 27, 2006, the Examiner has rejected Claims 20 and 21 for the reasons noted therein. It is believed that the above changes to the claims overcome these rejections.

On page 5 of the Official Action dated September 27, 2006, the Examiner has noted that if Claims 13 and 15 are found to be allowable, Claims 22 and 23 will be objected to under 37 CFR 1.75 as being a substantial duplicate thereof.

On pages 5-8 of the Official Action dated September 27, 2006, the Examiner has rejected Claims 6-8 and 12 under the provisions of 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Epp et al., U.S. Patent No. 5,882,137, in view of Orlich et al., German Patent 1,575,708 (English translated provided by Examiner). These rejections are respectfully traversed in light of the amendments to the claims.

As amended, Claim 6 now defines the invention as a ball joint comprising the ball joint defining an axis and including a housing, a ball stud having a ball head and a sealing bellows which lies against the housing and the ball stud in order to seal between the housing and the ball stud. Claim 6 recites that the ball stud has a *generally axially extending holding surface* against which a sealing surface of the sealing bellows lies and a *generally radially extending contact surface*. Claim 6 recites that holding surface is delimited towards the ball head by a *generally radially extending shoulder* which forms a generally radially extending surface adapted to serve as an abutment for the sealing bellows. Claim 6 further recites that the sealing surface defines a first axial dimension, the holding surface defines a second axial

dimension *between the generally radially extending shoulder and the generally radially extending contact surface*, and wherein the first axial dimension of the sealing surface of the sealing bellows is greater than the second axial dimension of the holding surface of said ball stud. (Emphasis added). None of the prior art of record, alone or in combination, discloses or suggests such a ball joint as now defined in Claim 6.

Specifically, neither U.S. Patent No. 5,882,137 to Epp et al. nor German Patent No. 1575708 to Orlich discloses or suggests a ball joint wherein the ball stud has: 1) a generally axially extending holding surface (i.e., reference character 20) against which a sealing surface of the sealing bellows lies and a generally radially extending contact surface (i.e., reference character 26); 2) that holding surface is delimited towards the ball head by a generally radially extending shoulder which forms a generally radially extending surface adapted to serve as an abutment for the sealing bellows; and 3) that the holding surface defines a second axial dimension (i.e., reference character B) *between the generally radially extending shoulder and the generally radially extending contact surface*; and 4) and wherein the *first axial dimension* of the sealing surface of the sealing bellows is greater than the second axial dimension of the holding surface of said ball stud, as now recited in Claim 6. (Emphasis added) Clearly, in both Epp et al. and Orlich, the associated ball stud does not include a radially extending contact surface (26) nor a second axial dimension (B) defined between the radially extending shoulder (22) and the radially extending contact surface (26), as shown in the present application and claimed in Claim 6. Rather, both Epp et al. and Orlich disclose that the associated ball stud has a cylindrical portion (i.e., reference character 18 in Orlich) and/or is conically shaped. Accordingly, it is believed that Claim 6, along with dependent Claims 7-9, 11 and 24, are patentable over the cited references.

Claim 12 has been amended to include the same limitations discussed above in Claim 6. Thus, for those reasons discussed above with respect to Claim 6, it is believed that Claim 12, along with dependent Claims 13, 15 and 25, are patentable over the cited references.

On pages 10-13 of the Official Action dated September 27, 2006, the Examiner has rejected Claims 19-23 under the provisions of 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Epp et al., in view of Orlich et al. and U.S. Patent No. 5,312,200 to Buhl et al. [It is noted that this rejection is basically the same as that above with respect to Claims 6-8 and 12 except that the Examiner uses the Buhl et al. reference for the teaching of a vehicle component mounted to the ball joint]. These rejections are respectfully traversed in light of the amendments to the claims.

Claim 19 is directed to a ball joint and vehicle component assembly and includes the same limitations discussed above in Claim 6. Thus, for those reasons discussed above with respect to Claim 6, it is believed that Claim 19, along with dependent Claims 20-23 and 26-28, are patentable over the cited references.

In view of the above amendments and accompanying remarks, it is believed that the application is in condition for allowance. However, if the Examiner does not believe that the above remarks and amendments place the application in condition for allowance, or if the Examiner has any comments or suggestions, it is requested that the Examiner contact Applicants' attorney at (419) 255-5900 to discuss the application prior to the issuance of an action in this case by the Examiner.

Respectfully submitted,



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